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ABSTRACT

The Chicago Public Schools have experienced major reforms since the late 1980s. This has resulted in increased power to local school communities and the creation of local school councils (LSCs) that employ its principals. This paper presents findings of a study that examined principals' perceptions of their changing roles under Chicago's school reform, and compares their responses to a 1984 study of Chicago principals (Morris, Crowson, and others). Data were obtained from interviews conducted with a non-random sample of 15 successful principals from a wide range of school and community settings. In comparison with the prior study's finding that principals engaged in "creative insubordination" in their interactions with the central office, this research indicates that: (1) principals perceive the community as a potential source of support, rather than as a threatening force; (2) the principal's role is shifting from that of the instructional leader to one of manager; and (3) principals are moving outside the bureaucracy to get assistance and resources. The situation is characterized by a complex blending of school and community, and the new school-site autonomy is increasing the demands for good management at the school level. Finally, principals in Chicago schools today are engaged in a more complex redefinition of school organization. Contains 11 references. (LMI)

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THE PRINCIPAL AS MINI-SUPERINTENDENT UNDER CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM

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Chapter 3

The Principal as Mini-Superintendent Under Chicago School Reform

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Introduction

Chicago's principals frequently refer to themselves as mini-superintendents these days. Their reasoning is that as key players in a reform movement emphasizing parent/community dominated governance at each of the city's schools, they find themselves contending with a real budget, board relations, entrepreneurial leadership expectations, school community politics, and staff-development issues. Many of the responsibilities of school superintendents suddenly are theirs. They find this set of expectations a far cry from the just-obey-the-orders-from-above culture of pre-reform Chicago.

What does it mean to be a principal in a large-city system who functions like a superintendent? Each principal in Chicago is employed by and is directly responsible to his or her own governing board. Yet there remain a central office, a General Superintendent of Schools, and a clear-it-with-the-folks-downtown attitude (if no longer mandate). Are there some lessons to be learned about the principalship in transformation from an examination of Chicago's unique combination of mini-superintendents at the school site and a system with a continuing instinct for micro-management of schools from the top?

Background

A major study of Chicago principals by Morris, Crowson, Porter-Gehrie, and Hurwitz (1984) was conducted in the pre-reform days of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The researchers used ethnographic strategies to study closely the daily activity and discretionary behavior of urban principals from a wide variety of community settings in the city. The memorable term creative insubordination emerged from the analysis of the data obtained by the research team. This phrase captured a predominant posture of principals vis-a-vis the school system bureaucracy of district, area, and central offices. It was not simply that discretionary behavior was observed in principals once thought to be handcuffed and constrained by the system; it was remarkable for its frequency and ingenuity as well.

We were led to reconsider the Morris et al. study as a base of comparison to a post-reform study of the principalship in Chicago. We were curious about the evolution of the role over time. Efforts to create "effective schools" in Chicago in the early 1980s had called for strong principal leadership, especially in the areas of instruction and student discipline. Would this latest round of enforced change demand a similar response from principals? We decided to visit some schools and to conduct some extended interviews with Chicago principals in a number of the corners of the city.

Just what had happened to possibly change the role of the principal. First, the State of Illinois had complicated Chicago Public School (CPS) politics in the intervening years by moving reform measures through the legislature and over the governor's desk. Reform legislation in 1988 was aimed, like a harpoon, directly at the Board of Education, the General Superintendent, and the bloated central office in Chicago. The basic strategy was to give increased power to local school

communities, some 575 of them, bleeding that power out of the central establishment. This was the second foray by the State which would enhance local control. In 1979 a School Finance Authority (SFA) had been appointed as a legislative oversight committee to monitor the political construction of the annual CPS budget and provide final approval for it. And increasingly, the SFA was taking an especially stiff position. The many millions of dollars in cuts necessary to keep the system afloat would have to be made in such a manner as to further implement the 1988 state-mandated system decentralization plan, according to the SFA. This was proviso made some Board members nervous and the General Superintendent unhappy.

Second, the four major elements of reform Chicago style had been in place for three years (1989-92). Local school councils (LSC) had been established in every local school community. Also, the councils either had approved incumbent principals (61%) or hired new ones (39%) across the city (Hess, 1992)--central office control over this crucial appointment prerogative had been shattered completely. Furthermore, LSCs and principals and teachers had written, revised, and begun to implement school improvement plans (SIP) in each school setting. Finally, some funds, particularly a share of those from State of Illinois Chapter I, had been transferred to local jurisdiction for discretionary decision making on the part of principals and LSCs. In schools serving children from poor families, a good deal of money was now available for school-site allocation and spending.

Third, the city once again had a strong mayor, Richard M. Daley, the first since the untimely death of Harold Washington. Mayor Daley was increasingly unhappy, publicly and privately, with the intransigence of the Board in balancing its budget. He could not go to Springfield (as his father had, so often and so successfully) to

bring home money to settle the demands of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and balance the books in the process. Perhaps because of this, Chicagoans were exposed, if not treated, to an incensed mayor on a succession of radio and television sound bites, blasting the very Board that he had appointed.

Fourth, the General Superintendent whom Chicago school reform had spawned now had his heels dug firmly into the turf of the central office. Relentless Chicago Tribune editorials accused him of favoring the status quo rather than even modest decentralization, and there appeared to be some truth to the accusations. Regardless, cuts in the CPS budget were eliminating many positions and even offices at headquarters. The furniture was being moved out.

The picture that crystallizes is as easy for the reader to understand as it was for us. A beleaguered central office under intense pressure from the State, from the SFA, from the mayor, and from local communities, but still moving reluctantly down the path to decentralization. Local school communities, marked by principal-parent and, in some instances, principal-parent-teacher alliances, quietly but steadily learning the rules of a new game. The king and his court preoccupied and off balance. The fiefdoms established and clawing out pieces of the action. What effect, we wondered, was all of this having on the role and behavior of Chicago building principals? Would the picture that Morris and his colleagues (1984) observed over a decade ago resemble the 1992 photograph? What might have remained constant? What might have changed?

The Informants

We identified 15 principals (men and women; Blacks, whites, and Hispanics; from a wide range of school and community settings; early career administrators to

veterans) whom we knew personally, or for whom we had strong references from other principals. The major bias in our informal sample is that we spoke with principals who have been largely successful in the "old" and "new" systems. We were prepared to trade honesty for such a bias. Furthermore, since discretionary decision making had been at the core of the original study, we wanted to speak with principals who might be employing such strategies in the fresh air of 1992.

We reviewed Principals in Action (the 1984 book by Morris and his colleagues) closely, extracting from the narrative ten sentences or short paragraphs which capture much of the essence of the research findings. In addition, we prepared clusters of questions around three additional topics--the central and district offices, the LSC, and (13) the SIP. At each interview we asked, "This is the way your predecessors as Chicago principals viewed their work and the system in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Is this the way it is now? Is this the way it is for you?" In the next section we examine the comparisons, presenting first the extract from the 1984 study, followed by our commentary on the 1992 picture.

The Impact of Reform

Instructional Leader

"The principal is expected to be the instructional leader to encourage new curricula and experimentation, upgrade staff quality, add new programs, and alter attitudes (1984, p. 77)."

Our interviews revealed a growing tension between the instructional leader and managerial roles of these principals, despite the normative press and even a state

law in Illinois mandating instructional leadership as the primary function of the principal. The external community and some faculty often want the principal to assume the time- and literature-honored role of instructional leader, but the events of school reform are demanding the principal's growing attention to political and administrative matters. "You try to clear the detail so that you can meet this expectation." In larger schools, principals feel even further from the classroom than before. These men and women increasingly are managers of their schools. Their involvement with the instructional program takes on an increasingly managerial slant as they bring new programs to their schools; assume active leadership in staff and professional development planning and implementation; nurse the school improvement plans with their curricular components; figure out how to protect teachers; and encourage teachers to be more autonomous. They are identifying teachers as the instructional leaders of the schools.

Handling the Neighborhood

"Principals are expected by the school system to establish friendly and useful relationships with their neighborhoods, but are also expected to protect the larger organization from the pressures of community groups (1984, p. 80)."

We received mixed messages here. A few principals see the situation as unchanged over the past ten years. Many more agree with the first part of the statement but disagree vigorously with the second part. One told us, "I don't work for the central office. There's more and more pressure to open the doors and let the community in." Apparently, some principals may not care any longer if the system is criticized by a group from the school community. In fact, one principal argued, "Successful principals are using parents to put pressure on the system." By no means is the image of the principal, under reform, that of the street-level

bureaucrat described in the earlier study (see also Crowson & Porter-Gehrie, 1980). Indeed, if anything, the relationship has turned around. Pressure upon the upper organization, with the help of one's community, can be an important part of successful mini-superintending.

Reeducating the Public

"The principal has to re-educate the public about the school's capabilities and re-educate the public about what it can reasonably expect from the school (1984, p. 116)."

Little consensus could be found in responses to this item. To be sure, these principals report that they are spending more time with parents and community residents than before reform. Some are trying to be realistic. "The system is overrated by parents in terms of what can actually be delivered." Others are asking for help. "Their kids can do better, but only if parents help out." Still others take a more assertive stance. "I have to develop standards. We have to raise our standards." Regardless of posture, most of these principals would agree with their colleague who said, "I feel like I spend more time doing this than educating the children. It's wearing me out!" What is particularly demanding here, it would appear, is the public relations aspect of the reformed Chicago principalship--a requirement familiar to superintendents but not traditionally a top priority among city principals.

Helping with Personal Needs

"A significant aspect of principaling, especially in poor neighborhoods, is helping parents and pupils with their personal needs (1984, p. 118)."

Principals in the 1992 survey are generally in agreement with the situation reported in 1984. As resources for assistance have dried up inside the Chicago Public Schools, principals are becoming increasingly proficient in helping students and parents use their own communities to satisfy their needs. Paradoxically, school reform in Chicago has had the effect of anchoring each public school more firmly to the fortunes of its neighborhood and diminishing the umbrella of assistance services and supports to families from central-office sources, while simultaneously, the needs of city parents and communities for personal help have been growing geometrically. Although some schools have begun actively to broker social services in their communities, our sense generally is that principals in this sample are struggling with this responsibility. The tendency, indeed, in many cases has been to retreat back into the school, doing one's best for kids and teachers, creating an island of safe learning amid the city's many pathologies.

Encouraging Parental Involvement

"In spite of improved opportunities for parental access, the principal still must encourage greater parent interest and participation in school (1984, p. 119."

Principals in the 1992 sample report to us that parental involvement is necessary but not sufficient. They positioned themselves somewhat counter to the popular current view that parental involvement is the key to school improvement. "Yes, but.. ..I'm becoming a little cynical in this regard. You've got to work with the students, in school. You get further with them." Or, "I like parental support, but I'm cautious. It's important, but it's not enough." Despite such caveats, these principals generally perceive themselves as energetic in inviting parents into their schools. In fact, some expressed concern over parents who still tend to trust the school system too readily. Reports were frequent of active, issue-oriented sub-

groups of parents and of strong parental participation in SIP development. One of the curious contradictions in Chicago school reform is that as a mini-superintendent employed by a local school board, the principal must be wary of the special politics of the neighborhood. Yet, there is that persistent need to enlist parental assistance in the learning process.

First Responsibility

"The building principal's first responsibility is to harness the unpredictability of the school community (1984, p. 77)."

The majority of our 1992 sample resisted the idea of the unpredictable community as their primary concern. They say, in contrast, that major attention is given to students--their needs, their educations, and their safety. The tag that most of them would wear proudly and prominently is student advocate. This answer, by the majority of our informants, was surprising. The reform movement strengthens considerably the power of the community, and many of Chicago's communities are certainly unpredictable. Furthermore, a close watch upon the community and a community-mindedness would be expected superintendent-like behavior (see Crowson & Morris, 1991). Nevertheless, our principals reported a first responsibility that looks downward and inward--a kids-first orientation quite unlike the my-Board-directs language heard often among superintendents.

Maintaining Enrollment

"It is advantageous for each principal to maintain enrollment. A big task, then, is to monitor, protect, and stimulate pupil attendance (1984, p. 129)."

Either you are in good shape ("We turn them away at the door.") or, you compete for students, in both the public and private sectors. Those principals who search for students recognize that, more than ever, they are in a market setting. "Only a feeling out there that we are topnotch will stem the tide." Academies and magnet schools have hurt some neighborhood schools in the past. Teachers find this a volatile local issue because jobs are at stake. Imaginative cheating by parents continues, as addresses are falsified to get their children into desirable schools; this old Chicago art form apparently stands uncleansed by reform. The principals in this sample are not preoccupied with the issue, but they monitor attendance and enrollment and capacity variables in their own schools, and in those of their neighbors. Interestingly, to the maintenance of student enrollment has been added the new task of maintaining faculty. Teachers, like the parents of magnet-school students, are inclined under reform to shop for improved professional environments.

Building the School Image

"Building a school's image is of prime importance to principals. In this regard, only two groups matter--the external clients (parents or the community at large), and the internal school bureaucracy, including the central office administration (1984, p. 13)."

Image building persists as an important activity for this 1992 cohort of principals. But in addition to parents and community residents, they see business leaders and teachers and students (current and prospective) as targets. Not a single principal in this sample claims to be concerned about image building for the benefit of the school bureaucracy. "The central and district offices don't count anymore. We're not line administrators anymore. We fend for ourselves. It's better to be alone than in bad company. I have no sympathy for them." Or even

more succinctly, "I don't care diddly about the bureaucracy anymore." We received clear indications of the extent to which Chicago school reform may be converting the district from a loosely coupled to an uncoupled system. For example, a number of principals note that they now advertise personally for new teachers in the city's newspapers, disdaining the central-office roster of available faculty. They explain that the citywide roster includes too many folks who are just being passed around in the system.

Creative Insubordination

"Knowing when and where and how to disobey is central to the decision making the principal. Such creative insubordination is carried out for the welfare of the school (1984, p. 150)."

What happens to the discretionary decision making of principals in a system of increasingly less salient for them? In a system where the consequences for bending or breaking the rules are reduced? On one hand, principals report that the opportunity for it increases. "I have more flexibility than I can handle," indicated one. Another blurted out, "I am going to use every inch of latitude that I can. If that's not part of your style, you're at a real disadvantage. Emphasize creative!" Even their skill in protecting their flanks has new twists, as several told us how they keep their LSCs updated on efforts to bend regulations and seize opportunities, all for the benefit of their schools. But another noted, "I follow rules on the little things because I know that I'll be taking risks on some big problems. I'll get what I want then." Actually, there may be less necessity for subterfuge now. A principal in this survey observed that "creative insubordination may actually become less necessary over time" in a more open and less oppressive

system. The new rules of the game increasingly appear to favor the school and the school community (increasingly its own system), and not the larger system.

Shaping the Job

"Principals program some of their own job satisfaction. That is, they shape their jobs to suit their own occupational tastes, despite the pressures of the system and the bureaucracy (1984, p. 203)."

Few findings from the original study receive as much affirmation as this one. For reasons both of proficiency and personal satisfaction, principals report that they slant their work to their strengths and interests. "I'm in the classrooms where I can see growth and change and action. That's what stirs me. I'm lucky that I suited reform," one principal said. Principals spoke of a willingness to make sacrifices, such as taking considerably more work home with them, to control at least some measure of satisfaction with their work. Interestingly, with a marked reduction in job security, the hard work and long hours of principaling in Chicago now can have a measurable and tangible payoff--a contract renewal. Although sometimes subverted in by circumstances, the belief sense among many principals is that dedication to the job will be recognized and rewarded, at least locally.

Next we turn to some observations based on analysis of the responses of the 1992 sample above. The issues involved here were simply not open to question in 1984.

Up the Bureaucracy

"The district office is virtually nonexistent. The central office? It depends upon the department." Each of the principals in this survey would agree with this statement. The uncoupling of the Chicago Public Schools nowhere is more evident, we suspect, than in this dismantling of the administrative hierarchy. Almost

uniformly these principals describe drastically changed relationships with the district and central offices. Schools seem to be much more autonomous--at least most of those represented by these principals. "It boils down to no relationship with the district office. Parents can't run there anymore. And there's even less with the central office. The central office has nothing to do with my running this school." Or, "The central office has a dotted-line relationship with us at best." Such heretical statements would have been both unheard and unheard of fifteen years ago in a system of layered district, area, and central offices--a system of regulation and obedience and permission.

At the same time, most of these principals believe that there are some strong reasons for the maintenance of a central office. Even today, most of them work the central office personally, almost like strong aldermen or alderwomen at City Hall, pushing the paperwork along and getting what they need to stimulate decision and action in the local school community. Many could contribute detailed arguments and recommendations for activities that should persist in a streamlined Pershing Road headquarters (e.g., payroll; personnel recruiting and processing; major computer functions; monitoring of state and federal grants). But given a chance to balance the next city-wide budget themselves, these principals undoubtedly would eliminate the last vestiges of the district offices and slash the central office even more deeply than it has been cut to date.

Local Control

These 15 principals appear to have worked out effective relationships with their LSCs. None report strain that might be a prelude to their transfer or dismissal. Several did comment on the unsophisticated quality of their LSCs, indicating that they spend a good deal of time educating parents and citizens (especially) and

teachers in the detail and nuance of educational governance and the complexities of the school system. More than one noted, superintendent-like, that his or her tenure with the school started with a focus upon the LSC. Training the LSC came first, then it was time to turn to teachers, classrooms, kids. None mistakes the crucial significance of the LSC. Principals' jobs depend upon LSC approval and support. One observed, "They are more important for me than they are for the life of the school." Another indicated, "Their support for me allows me to do a great deal." Others commented on the wider effects of LSCs. "We are working our way toward meaningful self governance." "They're the best in the world. They focus strictly on educational issues." "The LSC really lets us operate the school. They ask me to tell them what the teachers want."

It is particularly in this aspect of their work--contending with a local board--that many Chicago principals are beginning to act like mini-superintendents. To be sure, citizen and professional control over budget and personnel decisions in local school communities is far from complete. But, unquestionably, the trend from central to local control is continuing. LSCs have become a fact of life in Chicago, and these principals are learning how to work with them with somewhat surprising alacrity. "They are important to the reform process. I can't dictate to them. I come to them with recommendations and rationales, and then they decide. They are part of the school community." However, unlike many superintendents, these Chicago principals do not complain very much of LSCs intruding beyond policy-making into micro-management. Indeed, heard often is the complaint that the LSC members too seldom offer their own, independent suggestions for school improvement and policy direction.

Planning for the Present and the Future

The school improvement plans which were mandated by school reform were not without precedent in Chicago. Perhaps because of this, observers have tended to discount the importance of the SIP in the local reform process. To be certain, if one examines system-wide the detail of such plans, priorities and objectives and strategies for school improvement often can be questioned (Hess, 1992). But a different perspective emerges from our interviews with this small sample of principals. Most of them see the SIP as a vehicle of reform rather than only as an accountability document. One noted to us, "It's central for us. We turned it into the anchor for the school. It's where you capture and solidify commitments. And we build in the process for changing the plan. The SIP is where you articulate the vision." Another reported, "People here are so connected to it. The SIP is only as effective as the methodology that makes it happen, that's in the plan. It's a slow process--to build a plan and revise it over the years and implement it. But that's why people get tied to it. It's too important to be done quickly or by only a few people." Some of these principals take major responsibility for writing the plan, either in first draft or in total. Others use working committees quite extensively. One described the preparation of the SIP as a "teaching tool for management." Another observed that the SIP "becomes like the law." Still another said, "We really get teachers and their ideas into the plan. We come to school and spend a whole Saturday working on it. We bring in pizzas and cokes and get the job done together."

From Principal to Mini-Superintendent

The men and women principals whom we interviewed are institutional forward observers, out in front of many of their peers and colleagues in developing the forms and strategies for administering schools in a reforming school system. Often, we suspect, they envision what others do not yet see, and while we are

reluctant to generalize from their experience, we are equally reluctant to ignore their stories of practice in the here and now; their evolving insights; and their views of the future.

What report do they send us of the future of this venerable organization, and especially those who administer it? For one thing, the community is less dangerous to professional educators than it once was. The LSC is merely a representation of the community that has moved inside the school. The community used to be held at arm's length by most Chicago principals. That is the way the central office wanted it. Aspects of it occasionally were manipulated by astute principals, with or without permission, but a we-they mentality predominated across the city, regardless of community type. The doors of the school were locked, and the sign on the front one said, "Report to the office." But no longer, say these principals. The community and not the bureaucracy is the source of employment and hence allegiance. Again, this does not mean that outreach to the community has replaced a primary focus inside upon the kids. It does mean that the community now is a potential source of support rather than a source of ongoing trouble and conflict. If Chicago principals are relieved from their duties of keeping the moats around their schools filled with water and their bridges up, is a renewed focus on the welfare of teachers and the education of students a real surprise? These principals are now much more community-minded than simply school-protective. Thus, they do spend a good deal of time working outside the school and inside the school on outside matters. They are not slaves to the goal of parental involvement, however. Forced to make a choice, they would work with students rather than their parents.

It must not be forgotten that no group in the educational mix in Chicago has been affected so dramatically and jarringly by reform as the principals in the system.

They were stripped of tenure. They were thrown to the local wolves. Their jobs and assignments no longer would be determined by professionals in the central office, but rather by amateurs in the rough and tumble of competition in local school politics. Further, their overarching idea of a career in the system was shaken badly. No longer could one plan to start as a principal in a small elementary school and retire as an assistant superintendent or office director in the central office, moving between the two posts step by step in an orderly if political manner. Sitting tight in a local school makes more sense now. As a consequence, you work a little harder to create a cohesive and pleasant working environment where you are, one that produces some results that are important for teachers and parents.

The teachers' allegiance may be shifting ever so slightly as well. In 1984, the Chicago Teachers Union and its often feared building representatives posed a real constraint on principal behavior. However, in these interviews, we began to pick up the suggestion that teachers are identifying more than ever with their schools; that building representatives are playing a less critical role in the operation of the local sites; and that reform is loosening up one bureaucracy--the union--just as it is another--the school district.

The principals who find voice here are able to use more street smarts than ever before in operating their schools. At the same time, they sense that the need for creative insubordination and other forms of institutional subversion may be decreasing rather than increasing. For most of them, the central office is bothersome and distracting rather than dangerous and debilitating. It certainly is not worth protecting, and currying favor there appears to have been replaced, at least for most these principals, by extensive networking and political activity for the benefit of the school. These principals have numerous ideas about the shape of a

brave new central office, one with which they would have personal connections and interactions (much like their suburban and exurban counterparts) and one where streamlined services finally would help local schools on decentralized rather than centralized terms.

Reform in Chicago seems to be leading these principals into an interesting merger of managerial and instructional responsibilities. If, indeed, there is a renewed attention on the part of principals to teachers and students and classrooms, it seems that the strategies of attention often may be more managerial than strictly educational. We find it interesting and instructive that the decentralization of Chicago's schools may be having the powerful effect of moving the city's principals away from the mythologized role of instructional leader. The thrust is toward the superintendent-like role of manager and instructional manager. As managers, these principals now are involved heavily in scouting the urban territory for extra resources; exploiting an increasingly privatized world of service provision; worrying about the generation of positive public relations for the school; keeping abreast of community politics and community developments; feeding and caring for their LSCs; brokering a new symbiosis of interest between school and community; and recruiting top-flight personnel in creative ways that are often at odds with school system traditions.

Emerging Theoretical Considerations

Evidence from this exploratory study suggests the need for a more complex theoretical framework to examine principals' adaptations to Chicago school reform than that which drove the work of Morris and his colleagues (1984). The Morris study depended upon a Mintzbergian-like analysis of the principals' allocations of workaday time and attention. Theoretically, however, the central focus was more

organizational and political than ethnographic. The key interest of the researchers was in the discretionary behavior of the urban principal, in the face of a rules-and-regulations dominated school district bureaucracy. The study was much influenced by the work of Michael Lipsky (1977) and others on the topic of the street-level bureaucracy. While this perspective has merit, it must evolve and take into account the post-reform (or, perhaps, still reforming) demands on the Chicago principal.

A first, tentative outline of a changed theoretical perspective has been advanced recently which draws heavily upon the earlier work of Cibulka (1991) and Wong (1990) has been advanced recently by Crowson and Boyd (1992). They suggest that a new politics of institutional adaptation and modification is underway in city schooling. Increasingly, they argue, there is an adaptive realignment of educational organizations at their school-site grassroots, alongside an internal realignment of school district hierarchies between top-down and bottom-up ways of thinking and acting.

Cibulka (1991) observes that Chicago schools under reform will begin to vary widely in their individual responsiveness to immediate community environments. The match of a school to its environment may vary with the strengths of each community, with citizen commitment to reform, and with the skills of each school's leadership. Significantly, Cibulka (1991) urges those who would understand urban education to look for "school-specific organizational and environmental influences acting quite independently of institutional features (p. 37)."

School-specifics are vital to principals, thus the fascination in this inquiry with and emphasis upon the SIP. For it is here that the reflection and representation of the

community is documented--not that the community is controlling events, or even that the LSC is controlling them, but that the community is perhaps being newly represented in the Chicago Schools. It would not be difficult to understand from this perspective why the management of the school-site acquires added importance--for there is so much more now to be managed: a modest budget, an improvement plan, new resources, a school-community relationship, a student body with critical learning needs, as well as students and parents (and communities) requiring better linkages between school and the home and community.

One continuing aspect of school-site management remains a steady working of the school district bureaucracy, to serve as many advantages as are possible from above. However, the direction has changed. The Morris research focused upon principals' discretionary encounters with school system rules, controls, directives, guidelines, reporting requirements, career opportunities, and organizational norms. What happens when much of this is turned around, when the initiatives come from bottom-up rather than top-down? Increasingly, Chicago's principals are moving outside the system for both assistance and resources. Ask a Chicago principal, "Do you get much help from the central office?" The prototypical answer now is: "We handle things on our own."

Theoretical directions are far from clear here. First, it may not take much for a disintegrating bureaucracy to begin recapturing central-office control. Indeed, Brown (1992) has already discovered some decentralized city school systems busily recentralizing. He argues that decentralization is based heavily upon the beliefs that school-to-school variability is good, that the school site knows best, and that the individual schools and their personnel can be trusted. "When one or more of these key beliefs is eroded," says Brown, (1992: 291) "recentralization appears to be

more probable." And, this can easily happen if demands for accountability (particularly financial accountability) grow, if some hoped-for effects of reform (e.g., test-score improvement) do not surface, if district-wide retrenchments in budgets must be negotiated, and/or if some opposition groups (e.g., central office staff) work determinedly against decentralization.

Second, it would not be at all unlikely to discover a confusing organizational picture in which top-down and bottom-up initiatives lash with each other. Indeed, Wong (1990) already has noted reform-driven pressures in Chicago toward recentralization *along*side the continuing fragmentation of the system. Such a battle was illustrated publicly in late September, 1992. Faced with budgetary pressures, Chicago's Board of Education and General Superintendent suddenly slashed by forty-two percent the allocations to the city's high schools for all interscholastic sports and other extracurricular activities. The central-office expectation was that each of the city's principals would now scramble for alternative school-by-school sources of funding. Instead, in unprecedented action, the principals (who had been viewed as collectively disorganized since 1989) announced in concert, that all prep sports and extracurricular activities would be dropped across the city, pending Board restoration of full funding. The central office backed away and programs continued.

Third, however, it would not be unexpected in Chicago for reform to move toward a continuing, meaningful decentralization of bureaucratic authority toward the school site. This bottom-up pressure can occur, suggest Crowson and Boyd (1992), as "differences between the schools in adaptive relationships with their separate communities place pressures on the hierarchical organization to support and legitimize differences between the schools (p. 97)." As we noted earlier, the

new rules of the game in Chicago may favor the school and the school community and not the system. Indeed, evidence particularly of such decentralization side-effects as the growing privatization of service delivery, a neighborhood-based transformation of principals into mini-superintendents, and a further delegation of instructional leadership to small schools of classroom teachers all suggest the possibility of considerable staying power for Chicago's decentralized reforms.

Conclusion

We are just beginning to understand what it is that drives the building principalship in Chicago under reform. Fifteen interviews does not a consensus make, and we acknowledge once again that the results of this study may be suggestive, but not more than that. We realize, however, that the principal respondents in this study are leading us toward some emerging insights of importance in the understanding of reformed urban schooling. As one example, there may possibly be some new directions in school-community relations in the act of Chicago principaling. Less now a buffering of school from community or a socialization of parents into organizational folkways, the process seems today to be a much more complicated blending of school and community than before reform. Second, somewhat paradoxically, the new autonomy of the school site seems to be increasing considerably the demands for good management at the school site. City schools have a past reputation for over-management. Yet, a more complex school environment, freed from some central-office controls, finds principals engaged in learning anew how to manage the school organization--finding often that the act of planning for school improvement provides an important administrative anchor. Third, a snapshot from a decade ago of the Chicago principal as a creatively insubordinate respondent to a top-heavy bureaucracy contrasts sharply with the picture today of principals engaged in a much more complex and as-yet-unresolved

redefinition of the organization. Do the new rules of the game favor school and community--where the principal is a key actor--or will they eventually favor a system striving hard to recentralize? The persistence of reform in Chicago favors the former alternative, while ambivalence on the part of citizens and political leaders would encourage the latter. Chicago may not be ready for reform, but perhaps its school system finally is.

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